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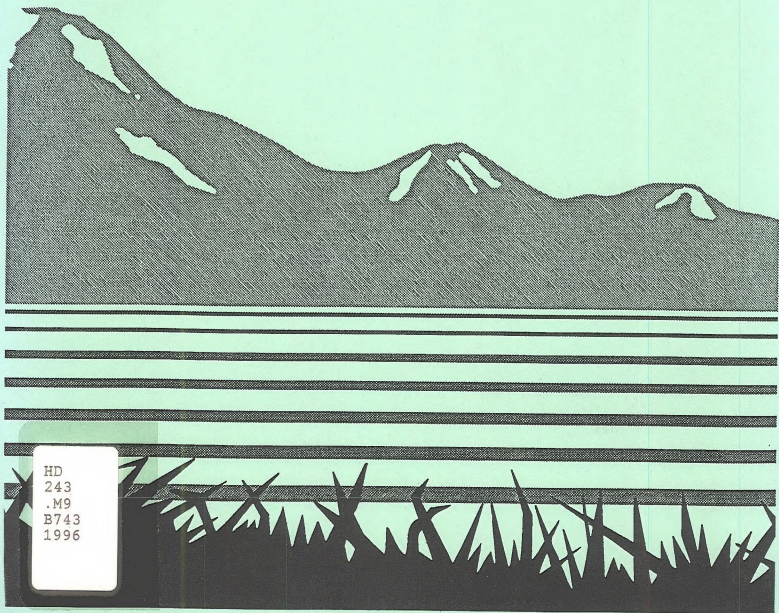
United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Montana State Office

June 1996

BRIEFING STATEMENTS

Montana/Dakotas



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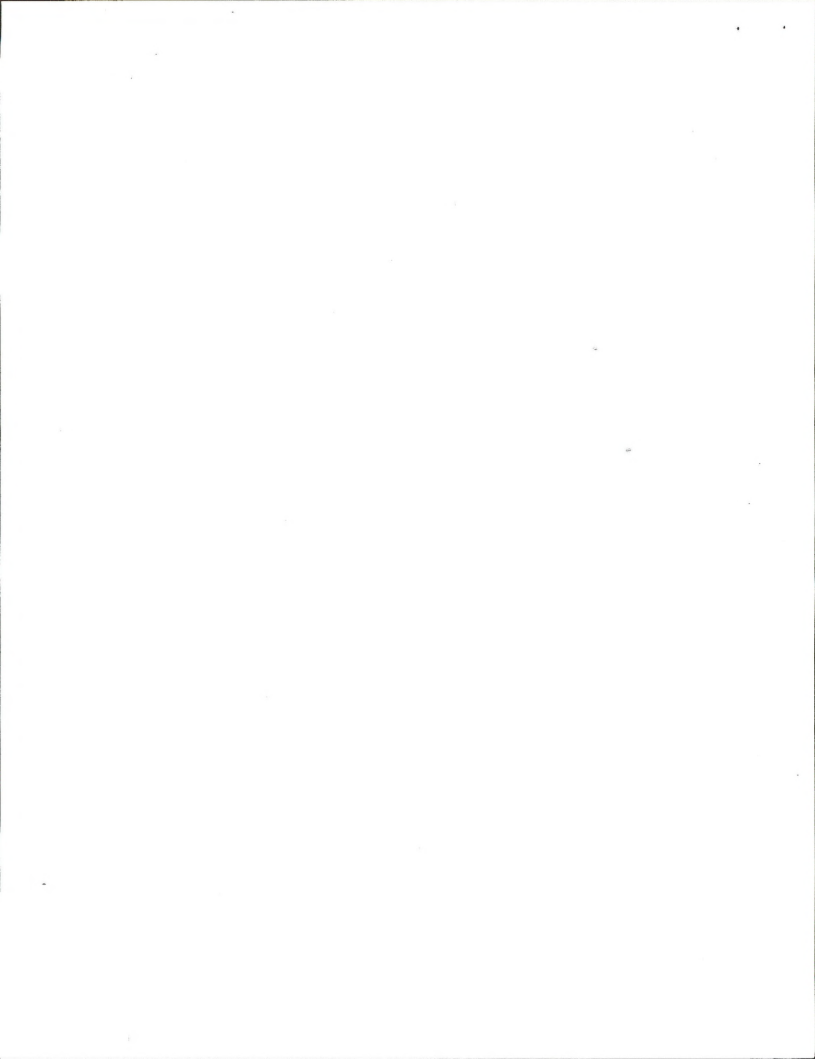
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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT OFFICES IN MONTANA, NORTH DAKOTA AND SOUTH DAKOTA

Montana State Office (headquarters for the three-state area)

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Francis R. Cherry, Jr., Associate State Director, 255-2983
Trudie Olson, Director, External Affairs Staff (Congressional liaison and information), 255-2913
Thomas P. Lonnie, Deputy State Director, Resources, 255-2805
Janet Singer, Deputy State Director, Support Services, 255-2742

Note: The Area Code for all of the above numbers is 406

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Dakotas District Office

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BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT OFFICES -continued-

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Great Falls Resource Area

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Miles City District Office

Glenn Carpenter, District Manager

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Billings Resource Area

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Big Dry Resource Area

Dave Swogger, Area Manager

111 Garryowen Road

Miles City, MT 59301

Telephone: (406) 232-4331

(FTS 700-323-0200)

Powder River Resource Area

Todd Christensen, Area Manager

111 Garryowen Road

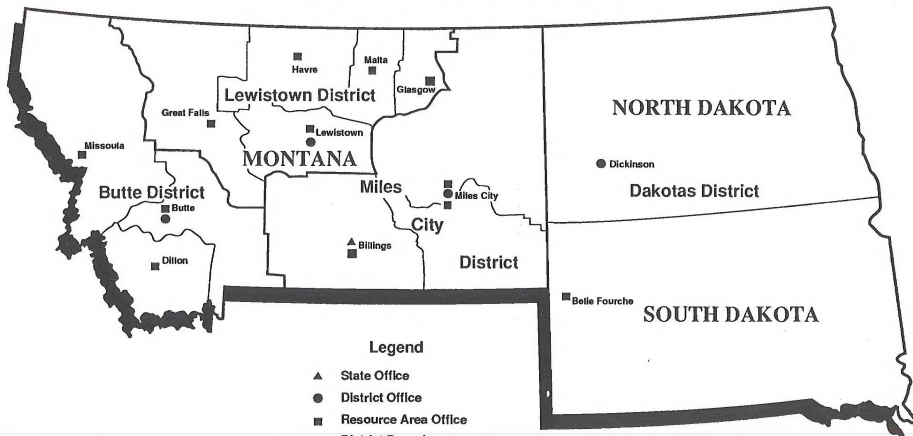
Miles City, MT 59301

Telephone: (406) 232-4331

(FTS 700-323-0200)

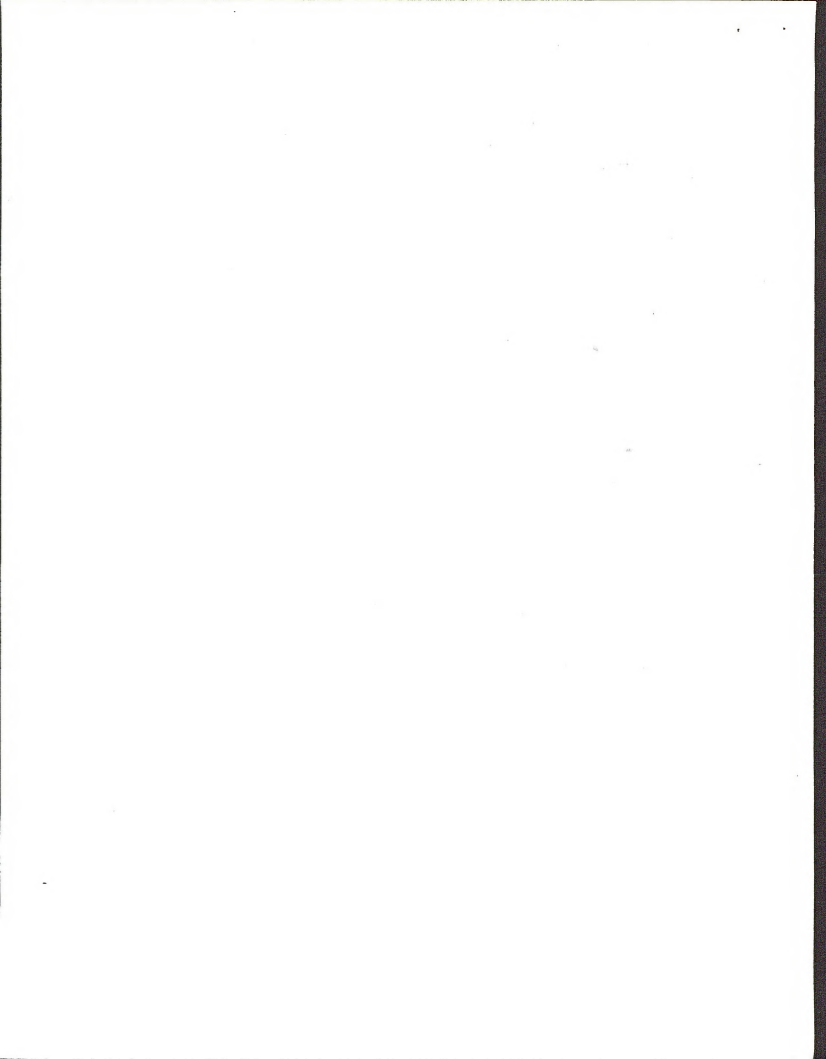
OFFICE LOCATIONS AND BOUNDARIES

MONTANA / DAKOTAS BLM



Legend

- ▲ State Office
- District Office
- Resource Area Office
- District Boundary
- Resource Area Boundary





BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Canyon Ferry Reservoir

ISSUE SUMMARY: On February 1, 1996, the BLM and the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) signed an inter-agency agreement to cooperatively manage the Canyon Ferry Recreation Area for 5 years. The long-term funding capability for this non-BLM-owned facility is a major concern for the BLM. A steering committee has determined functional responsibilities between the two agencies. The major workloads identified concern recreation, land and wildlife management issues.

AGENCY POSITION: The BLM welcomes the opportunity to cooperatively manage this area since Canyon Ferry complements BLM management of recreation facilities along the upper Missouri River and its tributaries. One of the goals in the long-term management strategy is to involve additional management partners and/or cooperators. With adequate funding and with outside as well as interagency cooperation, the potential exists to make this the best and most utilized water-based recreation area in the state.

BACKGROUND: Canyon Ferry is one of the most heavily used reservoirs in the state with over 200,000 visitor-days annually. It includes 267 home sites at the north end of the reservoir and several concessionaire leases. Until 1993, recreation operations at Canyon Ferry were managed by the state, but the state parks division turned the area back to BOR early in 1994 due to severe budget shortfalls. All state non-realty property has been removed from the premises.

In 1992, the BLM, the BOR and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposed an interagency approach for managing Canyon Ferry Reservoir through a memorandum of understanding (MOU). In his testimony at a congressional hearing concerning Canyon Ferry, however, BOR Commissioner Dan Beard indicated he wanted to review the MOU, and subsequently the three agencies could not reach consensus on a new agreement.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Local support for management partnerships is virtually universal. Governor Marc Racicot indicated his support for local partnerships when the 1992 three-party MOU was being considered. Currently, the BLM and BOR have working arrangements for law enforcement with the two counties involved in the project area.

CONTACT: James Binando, Supervisory Land Use Specialist, (406) 255-2935.



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Coordinated Ecosystem Planning in the Dillon Resource Area
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** The BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Forest Service (FS), National Park Service, Montana Department of State Lands, Montana Department of Fish Wildlife and Parks, and Beaverhead County Commissioners have identified a need for cooperative planning in Beaverhead County. These agencies are responsible for land use planning in the county and have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) stating they will work together to implement a coordinated ecosystem approach to planning efforts in Beaverhead County.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM supports collaborative decision making processes. Coalitions with all land management agencies, local and national interest groups, local landowners, and local governments are essential for successful implementation of long-term ecosystem management. This MOU provides an opportunity to build a coalition of this kind by sharing the costs of data collection and analyses necessary for planning using an ecosystem approach.
- BACKGROUND:** The interagency MOU for Beaverhead County was signed in June 1994. Since then, the steering group for the MOU has met monthly to exchange information about current planning efforts taking place in the county. A workshop was held for member agencies to learn about one another's planning processes and constraints. A citizen's advisory group was also developed to ensure local involvement in this process.
- If it is found that the Dillon Resource Area's management framework plan (MFP) needs revision, the amendment process would begin upon completion of the landscape analysis process. The groundwork laid by the MOU will improve the quality of these planning documents and promote viable public involvement. The MOU will also allow us to share costs and information. We are currently exploring the possibility of creating a data link to the bureau's target system with the county and FS to enhance our data sharing capability.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Some of the entities involved in the MOU include: Beaverhead County Commissioners, Beaverhead National Forest, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Montana Department of State Lands, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Butte District of the BLM. The Beaverhead County Planning Board, the local media, and many members of the public have also expressed interest in becoming involved in this effort.
- CONTACT:** Scott Powers, Dillon Resource Area Manager, (406) 683-2337.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Muddy Creek Allotment Management Plan (AMP)

ISSUE SUMMARY: In 1993 the BLM prepared the Muddy Creek AMP and Environmental Assessment (EA). This plan was protested and still has not been resolved. The allotment involves controversies over the implementation of riparian standards and guidelines, and livestock use management versus wildlife values.

AGENCY POSITION: The BLM's policy is that riparian-wetland areas must be managed to achieve proper functioning condition while meeting the requirements of the Clean Water Act. Consideration must also be given to the other resources and uses of public lands. The Muddy Creek Management Plan objectives and management strategies were developed based on this policy.

BACKGROUND: Because the Muddy Creek AMP was protested, cattle grazing was authorized under a one year lease in 1993. The lessee also requested a formal consultation under Section 8 of the Public Rangelands Improvement Act, and a working group was established to review the proposed plan. The working group has done its initial evaluation but has asked for more time to prepare its recommendations which were due early in 1995.

The BLM prepared an operating plan and EA for a one year grazing authorization for 1994. A decision on this one year plan was issued on July 15, 1994. Grazing in the 1994 season was authorized at the 1993 level.

Because the Section 8 group did not submit its report, a Notice of Final Decision was issued on May 19, 1995, based on the alternatives analyzed in the 1993 EA. That decision was appealed on June 25, 1995. Since the appeal has not been heard and no decision has been rendered by the administrative law judge, the BLM issued one-year authorizations at the 1993 level for 1995 and 1996, as required in the grazing regulations.

The Muddy Creek Allotment contains 17,000 acres of public land, 5,000 acres of national forest land, and 1,600 acres of private land. The area also includes many wetlands. The eastern half of the area is included in the Hidden Pasture Wilderness Study Area. Hiking, hunting, backcountry driving, camping, and wildlife viewing are common recreational activities in the area. Muddy Creek contains a genetically pure strain of westslope cutthroat trout, a state-listed species of special concern. Habitat is provided for moose, elk, bighorn sheep, and a host of other wildlife species. Several species are candidates for federal listing.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Several national conservation groups, private individuals, and the lessee have expressed concerns for the management of the Muddy Creek Allotment. The National Wildlife Federation and the lessee protested the proposed 1993 decision on the management plan.

CONTACT: Scott Powers, Dillon Resource Area Manager, (406) 683-2337.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Big Dry Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS)
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** Two issues were identified during scoping and preparation of the draft RMP/EIS:
1. Special management designations apply to those areas that contain special values or resources and require special management.
 2. Resource accessibility and availability refers to the value or ability to use certain resources by improved accessibility and availability. Resources must have legal and physical access to be used. In order to protect the integrity of other resource values, activities such as the development of oil and gas and other minerals, forest products, and recreational areas should be balanced. Open access to areas could lead to degradation of visual, cultural or vegetative resource values.
- The Big Dry RMP/EIS was initiated in FY89. The draft RMP/EIS was published and distributed in February 1993. The final RMP/EIS was published and distributed in February 1995.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The Big Dry RMP/EIS replaces five existing management framework plans (MFPs) and will cover the BLM-administered land in the Big Dry Resource Area.
- BACKGROUND:** In the 1960s and 70s, the BLM conducted planning efforts that resulted in the formation of MFPs. Because of changing circumstances, new legislation and new policies, a more comprehensive form of planning was needed. Since 1980, RMPs have been replacing MFPs.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Public scoping meetings and public meetings on the draft document were held in Forsyth, Miles City, Glendive, Terry, Baker, Wolf Point, Sidney, Jordan and Circle in 1990 and 1993, respectively. Throughout the development of the plan, contact has been made with federal, local, and state governments, Native American tribes, special interest groups and concerned citizens.
- The protest period on the final RMP/EIS ended April 17, 1995. The director of BLM received thirteen protest letters. As a result, further planning was conducted for the Calypso Trail near Terry. The BLM issued a record of decision (ROD) for all the remaining decisions in April 1996.
- In June 1996, the Supplement to the Big Dry RMP/EIS that addresses management of the Calypso Trail will be made available. Following a 30-day protest period, a ROD will be issued.
- CONTACT:** Dave Swogger, Big Dry Resource Area Manager, (406) 232-4331



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Lonesome Lake Prairie Wetlands Project

ISSUE SUMMARY: The Lonesome Lake complex is a Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) withdrawal coming back to the BLM after the withdrawal review. To resolve questions about the future management of the area, the BLM (lead agency) released a draft environmental assessment (EA) and land use plan amendment in November 1994. During the public comment period, a Cooperative Resource Management (CRM) group met to pursue consensus on resource conflicts with the goal of developing a management alternative which would be acceptable to all stakeholders.

AGENCY POSITION: As the decision-making agency, the BLM encouraged the various public interests to resolve their differences through a collaborative process. The BLM will use information from the CRM group along with other public comments to produce a final management plan for the public lands in the Lonesome Lake area.

BACKGROUND: The Lonesome Lake complex consists of 17,898 acres of uplands, croplands, wetlands and ephemeral water. Located 70 miles south of Canada and 6 miles northwest of Big Sandy in north central Montana, the complex is about 88 percent public land (15,739 acres) and is in the highest priority region in the U.S. and Canada (as identified by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan) for potentially restoring migratory waterfowl populations to 1970 levels. There are 12 livestock grazing and agricultural permits issued on the complex.

The BLM cooperated with the BOR and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) to release the draft EA in November 1994, with input from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MDFWP). The draft analyzed three alternatives. The preferred alternative would protect and enhance wildlife habitat with special emphasis on managing the wetland and native prairie resources for migratory birds, while phasing out grazing and farming leases. The BLM conducted public meetings in December 1994 to discuss the draft EA and gather public comments. In January 1995, the BLM provided a fourth alternative for managing the area and subsequently extended the public comment period for the EA to October 31, 1995.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Public interest has been high. During the public meetings in December 1994, the comments offered favored managing the area either for wildlife or for agricultural practices. However, the main parties providing comments recognized room in the middle and have since taken steps to enter into a collaborative process to achieve a mutual position. The BLM encouraged the formation of a CRM group while abiding by the boundaries created by the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The active CRM participants were local operators of grazing permits and agricultural leases, Montana and National Wildlife Federations, Audubon Society, USFWS, MDFWP, Natural Resource Conservation Service, county government, and Senator Burns' office. The group obtained consensus on significant resource issues, including recommendations to complete the withdrawal revocation; maintain a functioning shortgrass prairie ecosystem; improve wildlife habitat and range productivity; dispose of isolated public land tracts; and protect and interpret cultural resources. The CRM group was accepted as a subgroup of the Lewistown District Resource Advisory Council and is interested in maintaining an active role as the final management plan is implemented.

CONTACT: Owen Billingsley, Havre Resource Area Manager, (406) 265-5891.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT:

Crown Butte's Proposed New World Mine

ISSUE SUMMARY:

The proposed mine is about 2.5 miles north of Cooke City in Park County, and about 3 miles from the northeast corner of Yellowstone Park. It is also about 2 miles from the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. The New World Mining District was specifically excluded from the wilderness area by both the U.S. Geological Survey and congressional action (1978) due to the area's historical mineral production and potential for future development. The U.S. Forest Service (FS) and Montana Department of State Lands (DSL) are lead agencies in reviewing the proposed plan of operations for the project. Montana BLM has no involvement in this process.

The BLM is processing a patent application from Crown Butte for four claims covering 27 acres. A patent is not necessary for mining to occur on these claims. A related issue to this action is the proposed withdrawal of federal lands in the area. (See "New World Mine Area Proposed Withdrawal and Recently Filed Mining Claims" on the following page.)

AGENCY POSITION:

The field examination for the patent application is complete. The mineral report is being written and should be finalized late in 1995. The entire file then will be sent to Washington for final action. Montana BLM is not part of the permitting process for the proposed project. (Wyoming BLM is involved because a proposed power line right-of-way crosses public land in Wyoming.) Processing the patent applications has no impact on the permit review process.

BACKGROUND:

PLAN OF OPERATIONS—A revised plan of operations was submitted in October 1992 proposing a 1,500 to 1,800 ton-per-day underground mine and associated mill complex. Ore would be crushed at the mill, and gold, silver and copper concentrated by conventional flotation and gravity separation methods (no cyanide). Tailings from the mill would be piped to a disposal impoundment in the Fisher Creek drainage which flows east, away from Yellowstone Park and into the Clark Fork of the Yellowstone River. A 68-mile power line from Cody, Wyoming, would also be needed.

Mine life is projected to be 10-15 years with a workforce of about 175 people. The FS and DSL are jointly writing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the project. The BLM, Montana Department of Health and Environmental Sciences, Wyoming Public Service Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service and the Corps of Engineers are cooperators. The draft EIS is scheduled for mid-1996.

PATENTING PROCESS—A patent application for a 17-acre lode claim was filed in August 1991. A second application for four claims covering 27 acres was filed in April 1992. The first application was withdrawn in May 1994 after the company eliminated plans to extract ore from that claim using surface mining techniques and cyanide recovery methods. The claims being evaluated contain about 15 percent of the reserves in the planned mine area.

PUBLIC INTEREST:

Public interest is very high due to the project's proximity to Yellowstone Park. Issues include potential impacts to water quality; effects on regional recreational and scenic resources; potential impacts on wildlife, including grizzly bears; social and economic impacts on local communities; and difficulties in reclamation work at such a high elevation. Senator Baucus has expressed significant concerns over potential impacts. Wyoming has expressed concerns that Montana will reap the primary economic benefits from the mine while Wyoming will experience many of the adverse socio-economic impacts.

CONTACT:

Randy Heuscher, Supvy. Mining Engineer, (406) 255-2816.



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Crown Butte's New World Mine Area Proposed Withdrawal and Recently Filed Mining Claims
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** Following an announcement by President Clinton that the federal lands administered by the Forest Service (FS) in the proposed Crown Butte gold mine development area near Cooke City, Montana, would be protected from future mineral entries, Crown Butte Mines, Inc. filed 38 additional mining claims (see "Crown Butte's Proposed New World Mine," previous page). The claims were located after the president's public announcement but prior to completion of agency action to legally establish a moratorium on additional mining claim locations. Montana BLM's position is that the FS is the logical lead for the proposed withdrawal action. The FS, however, disagrees. The issue has been raised to the Headquarters and Departmental levels of both agencies.
- AGENCY POSITION:** A Notice of Proposed Withdrawal was prepared by the BLM's Montana State Office (MSO) on August 29 and forwarded that same day to the Federal Register. It was published September 1, 1995, which is the effective date of segregation. The federal lands were still open to mineral location for 1 week from the date of the president's announcement until publication of the notice on September 1.
- BACKGROUND:** The New World Mine area is located in southern Montana in the Gallatin and Custer National Forests, adjacent to Yellowstone National Park's eastern boundary and the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area.
- On August 25, 1995, while touring Yellowstone National Park, President Clinton met with the press and representatives of numerous groups opposed to mineral development in the area surrounding Cooke City. He announced his intention to place a 2-year moratorium from mineral entry on all federal lands in the New World Mine area. On August 26, local newspapers carried the story, along with several supporting articles by various special interest groups. It was clearly stated that while the segregation may have a limited effect on the existing mine proposal, it would perhaps limit the number of alternative sites for potential development.
- On August 28, the MSO was asked to prepare a legal description of the mine area. That information was used by the Interior Department to develop a petition for withdrawal, which was signed by Secretary Babbitt on August 29. That same day, after receipt of the signed petition, the MSO prepared the Federal Register notice. As of September 1, the federal lands described in the notice are closed to the location of new mining claims for 2 years. This will allow time to complete environmental studies, obtain public input, evaluate the proposal and submit final recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior. The segregation covers approximately 19,100 acres.
- On August 27, Crown Butte Mines Inc. located 28 mill site claims. The company located another 10 mill site claims on August 28 and 29. Notification of the filing of the 28 claims was received in the MSO on August 29, while notification of the filing of the other 10 claims was received August 31. The 38 claims total 185.57 acres.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Public interest remains high as to all aspects of this project. The American Rivers group, the Greater Yellowstone Coalition, and other environmental groups are all extremely interested in the New World Mine area proposed withdrawal.
- CONTACT:** Jim Binando, Chief, Branch of Land Resources, (406) 255-2935 or
Dee Baxter, Chief, Lands Adjudication Section, (406) 255-2943.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTA BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Oil and Gas Inspection and Enforcement (I&E) Work - Native American Self-Determination
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** During the last 3 years, two tribal governments in Montana and one in North Dakota have submitted requests to enter into cooperative agreements to assume the responsibility of performing production-related oil and gas I&E work on trust minerals on their respective reservations. The first tribe to enter into a cooperative agreement has now entered into a contract under the Indian Self-Determination Act to assume all I&E responsibilities and some surface oil and gas responsibilities on its reservation.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM is one of a number of federal agencies charged with assuring the maximum Native American participation in federal services to their communities so as to render these services, such as oil and gas I&E work, more responsive to the needs and desires of those communities. Under provisions of the Federal Oil and Gas Royalty Management Act (FOGRMA), we are authorized to enter into contracts or cooperative agreements with Indian tribes to delegate our authority to conduct inspections, audits, and investigations of oil and gas leases. We are also directed by the Indian Self-Determination Act to enter into contracts with tribal organizations, at their request, to have them plan, conduct, or administer programs that we provide for Indians because of their status as Indians.
- BACKGROUND:** Three tribal governments have approached the Montana State Office about assuming the responsibility for oil and gas I&E work on their respective reservations. A cooperative agreement with the Blackfeet Tribe was successfully negotiated, signed, and in effect from February 1994 through September 1995. This agreement authorized the tribe to complete production-related activities on tribal leases with the BLM providing 50 percent of the funding. In October 1995, this cooperative agreement was superseded with a Self-Determination Act contract which transfers the responsibility for completing all oil and gas I&E activities on both tribal and allotted leases on the reservation to the tribe. It also transfers responsibility for some environmental/surface protection activities to the tribe. The BLM is providing full funding for this contract. Blackfeet Tribal officials are pleased with the historical significance of this contract and feel that this a first step toward self-determination.
- The tribal government of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes initially approached the BLM with a tentative request to enter into a contract under the Self-Determination Act, but have since changed that request to entering a cooperative agreement under the provisions of FOGRMA. This agreement was signed on June 26, 1995, and one tribal inspector is in training for certification in production work. This agreement has been modified to include training for certification in drilling and abandonment work. The modification of the agreement is to prepare the Fort Peck Tribes to negotiate a Self-Determination Act contract for oil and gas I&E work in the near future.
- The government of the Three Affiliated Tribes at the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota initially submitted a request for a cooperative agreement, but later withdrew that request.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Public interest in this issue is high in Native American communities in the three states and will likely grow in the future.
- CONTACT:** Howard Hubbs, State Oil and Gas I&E Coordinator, (406) 255-2779, or John Bown, Trust Minerals Coordinator, (406) 255-2872.



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Fina/Chevron Applications for Permit to Drill (APDs)
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** Fina Oil and Chemical Company and Chevron USA both want to drill exploratory wells on their leases in the Badger-Two Medicine area of the Lewis and Clark National Forest, south of Glacier National Park (GNP). The Fina site is about 2.5 miles south of US Highway 2 and the southern boundary of GNP on a broad ridge between Hall Creek and one of its tributaries; the Chevron site is approximately 9 air miles southeast of the Fina site on the northeast slope of Goat Mountain, between the north and south forks of Badger Creek.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM "adopted" the Forest Service (FS) decision to approve Fina's surface use and operating plan, and on January 12, 1993, the BLM approved Fina's APD for a single exploratory well. The Secretary of the Interior has since approved three consecutive 1-year suspensions to the APD. The most recent suspends it to June 30, 1996.
- The Lewis and Clark National Forest recently received a final report from a contractor regarding the eligibility determinations for cultural properties within the Badger-Two Medicine area. It appears that roaded access to the Fina site is within a portion of the eligible area. In compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (106 process), the FS recommendations and copies of the eligibility report will be sent to the State Historical Preservation Officer (SHPO) and the affected American Indian tribes for comment. If consensus as to the eligibility and boundaries is reached with SHPO, an assessment of the effects of Fina's proposal will be conducted. If no agreement can be reached, the matter will be forwarded to the Keeper of the Register for a formal determination. The Forest Supervisor has requested that the BLM issue a suspension of operations and production on Fina's lease pending these actions.
- The decision on the Chevron APD is still pending completion of this same review.
- BACKGROUND:** The BLM decides whether or not to approve APDs on federal leases. On national forest land, however, the FS has primary responsibility for surface related issues while the BLM has primary responsibility for "down hole" issues.
- Fina submitted its APD in 1983, and it was approved three times previous to the 1993 decision: January 31, 1985; April 13, 1987; and February 19, 1991. All three decisions were appealed to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (IBLA). The IBLA remanded the 1985 decision, returned the 1987 decision to the agencies at the request of the FS, and remanded the 1991 decision at the request of the BLM. Primary issues of the appeals were grizzly bear habitat; the rights retained by the Blackfeet Tribe; proximity to GNP and the Bob Marshall and Great Bear wildernesses; and the split of responsibilities between the BLM and the FS. Among the many appellants were the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), the Blackfeet Indian Tribe, the Alliance for the Wild Rockies, and the Badger Chapter of the Glacier-Two Medicine Alliance. The Assistant Secretary of the Interior concurred with the 1993 decision to approve the APD; therefore, it was not subject to appeal to the IBLA. The NWF, five other conservation groups, and three Native American groups filed suit on April 14, 1993, in U.S. District Court in Great Falls, Montana. The suit against the BLM and FS was filed to set aside the approved APD. Based on the secretary's suspension order, the Department of Justice filed a motion to dismiss the NWF et al. lawsuit. On July 28, 1993, the district court denied the motion to dismiss and ordered all proceedings in the case stayed until May 1, 1994. The court has ordered continuance of this stay until June 30, 1996.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Public interest is very high. National organizations are involved, and decisions occasionally get statewide attention. Demonstrations of opposition were staged in Great Falls and Missoula, Montana, following the 1993 decision to approve the APD. The secretary's decision to suspend the APD for the third time was based on the Montana delegation's desire to submit new wilderness legislation that would include the Badger-Two Medicine as a study area.
- CONTACT:** Richard Hopkins, Great Falls Resource Area Manager, (406) 727-0503.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Blackleaf Gas Field

ISSUE SUMMARY: The BLM issued a Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on field development in 1992. As a result of public involvement, the BLM decided not to issue a record of decision (ROD) until receipt of a drilling application. Notices of Staking (NOSs) for natural gas test wells were filed on January 20, 1994 (Well No. 1-30), January 8, 1996 (Well No. 1-2 and Well No. 1-24).

An onsite inspection for Well No. 1-30 was conducted in October 1994 and an Application for Permit to Drill (APD) was submitted on December 2, 1994. The proposal is to drill the well directionally from the bottom of Muddy Creek. Directional drilling would be more environmentally acceptable for this bottom hole location than the traditional vertical drilling analyzed in the Blackleaf FEIS. Onsite inspections for Well Nos. 1-2 and 1-24 will be scheduled for the summer of 1996. Bureau decisions on the FEIS and the proposed wells are required.

AGENCY POSITION: The BLM must develop an ROD on the FEIS for the Blackleaf Field Development, and issue a decision on the three proposed wells. This will require coordination with the Forest Service and the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks. The BLM is currently studying whether there is any new information that would require the FEIS to be supplemented.

BACKGROUND: The Blackleaf Oil & Gas Unit is located along the Rocky Mountain Front 75 miles northwest of Great Falls. It currently has four unplugged natural gas wells and contains about 10,300 federal, 1,400 state, and 13,300 private mineral acres. Well No. 1-30 is located on state surface and federal minerals. Well Nos. 1-2 and 1-24 are located on federal surface and federal minerals. Because of the high level of public controversy surrounding the Rocky Mountain Front, and the potential conflict with grizzly bears and other threatened and endangered species, the BLM prepared an FEIS on field development.

EPS Resources, previous unit operator, was in bankruptcy at the time the 1-30 NOS was filed. The NOS was submitted by the bankruptcy trustee, Carl D. Hanson. The unit has been shut-in because of the bankruptcy, but it has excellent potential for natural gas production.

A public involvement meeting concerning the NOS was held in Great Falls August 15 and 16, 1994, to ask the public to identify their issues and concerns. The BLM will compare these comments with those previously addressed in the Blackleaf FEIS to determine if any issues or concerns were not adequately addressed. If significant new issues or concerns are identified it may be necessary to supplement the FEIS. If no significant new issues are identified a supplement will not be required.

In January 1995, the EPS bankruptcy was settled, and on June 20, 1995, FINA Oil and Chemical Company (FINA) was designated and approved as the Blackleaf Unit operator. They have accepted the proposed APD for Well No. 1-30 and will conduct operations under their Nationwide \$150,000 bond. FINA intends to test the existing wells to determine the economic viability of the Blackleaf project. The final decision to drill the 1-30 well will depend upon the well test results. Proposed Well Nos. 1-2 and 1-24 are outside of the Blackleaf Unit and were submitted by McMahon-Bullington.

PUBLIC INTEREST: National and local environmental groups are opposed to any development on the Rocky Mountain Front. The Montana Wilderness Association, Island Range Chapter, is very interested in the Blackleaf area.

CONTACT: Richard Hopkins, Great Falls Resource Area Manager, (406) 727-0503.



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: West Hiline Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment
(Sweet Grass Hills Mineral Withdrawal)

ISSUE SUMMARY: The BLM's May 1996 final amendment/environmental impact statement (EIS) to the West Hiline RMP proposes withdrawing all federal minerals (19,765 acres) in the planning area that encompasses the Sweet Grass Hills (SGH) about 100 miles north of Great Falls, Montana. The EIS analyzes locatable mineral development, oil and gas leasing, off-road vehicle use, and land tenure adjustment. The EIS was prompted by Manhattan Minerals' (US) Ltd. proposal to explore for hardrock minerals on East Butte in the SGH. Primary issues include protecting areas of traditional spiritual importance to Native Americans, and protecting aquifers in the East Butte area that supply potable water to local residents. The State Historic Preservation Officer has asked the BLM to nominate a National Register District as part of the Section 106 consultation process. Previous public involvement indicates a majority of local landowners oppose a nomination.

AGENCY POSITION: Proposals in the final EIS will afford the maximum protection for this area that BLM can provide within its statutory authority. However, mining could still occur on valid, existing claims that are unaffected by the EIS. Of the 14 federal mining claims that have been filed, BLM has determined that six are not valid, a finding the claimant is contesting.

In addition to the 19,765-acre withdrawal, "No Surface Occupancy" stipulations will be placed on new oil and gas leases within the 6,328-acre Sweet Grass Hills Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). The withdrawal would make permanent a series of temporary segregations that have been in place since August 1993. A Record of Decision to implement the EIS' proposals will not be issued until a protest period ends in mid-June 1996.

BACKGROUND: As the West Hiline RMP was originally written, the SGH ACEC did not include a mineral withdrawal. Although mineral exploration was approved in the area in 1986 and again in 1989, the BLM felt the scope of Manhattan's 1992 proposal, coupled with increased concerns regarding Native American issues, justified a separate EIS. The draft EIS for this exploration proposal was issued for public review in January 1993, but this process was suspended pending completion of the RMP amendment.

Public meetings on the draft amendment/EIS were conducted at four locations between February 27 and March 2, 1995. Public comment on the draft ended on May 18, 1995.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Public interest is extremely high. Area residents are concerned that domestic water sources will become deficient in either quality or quantity. Representatives of six tribes have expressed concern about preserving the Hills' sacred nature and have stated that mining cannot be mitigated. Nearly everyone who commented during public meetings on the exploration proposal and on the draft amendment/EIS was opposed to exploration activity. The Sweet Grass Hills Protective Association (a local group that includes ranchers, environmentalists, and tribes) has campaigned against exploration and potential mining in the SGH. The BLM received letters and forms against the exploration and mining from numerous national, regional and state groups.

CONTACT: Richard Hopkins, Great Falls Resource Area Manager, (406) 727-0503.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Zortman-Landusky Mines

ISSUE SUMMARY: The Final EIS for the *Zortman and Landusky Mines Reclamation Plan Modifications and Mine Life Extensions* was issued April 5, 1996. Jointly prepared by the BLM and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Final EIS proposes a plan for continued mining with modified reclamation using mitigation measures developed by the BLM and DEQ to avoid or reduce environmental impacts. A Record of Decision implementing the EIS is expected in June.

AGENCY POSITION: The BLM and DEQ are co-lead agencies for processing the mine expansions and reclamation modifications. The Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers are cooperating agencies. The Final EIS corrects inadequacies in the reclamation plans for managing materials that could generate acid and allows ZMI to develop its mineral property rights consistent with state and federal environmental laws. Public involvement efforts have been extensive throughout the entire planning process.

BACKGROUND: The Little Rocky Mountains (LRM) are an historic mining district in northcentral Montana. Modern mining began in 1978 using the first cyanide heap leach process in the state. In 1979 the State of Montana prepared an environmental impact statement (EIS) for the Zortman and Landusky mining operations. Both permits have been amended approximately 10 times as the mines have grown. The mines are located on a mixture of private and BLM-managed lands.

In May 1992, ZMI filed an application with the Lewistown District BLM and the Montana Department of State Lands, now DEQ, to expand mining operations at the Zortman Mine increasing total disturbance from 400 to approximately 1200 acres.

Acid rock drainage (ARD) has been a problem at both the Zortman Mine and the nearby Landusky Mine. In a March 1994 decision, the BLM and DEQ combined analysis of ARD corrective measures for the Landusky Mine with the EIS for the Zortman Mine expansion. The scope of the combined EIS addresses expanded mining at both mines along with improved reclamation and remediation plans needed to address ARD at both mines.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Though the mine employs some Native Americans, residents of the adjacent Fort Belknap Reservation generally oppose mining in the LRM, citing impacts to water quality, water rights, religious and cultural resources, wildlife and native land claims as the basis for their opposition. The mines are of key economic importance to Phillips County and contribute to the regional economy. They have the strong support of the county commissioners, local business groups, and the community in general. ZMI has laid off approximately 180 of its 280 employees while waiting for expansion approval. The layoffs have caused significant economic hardship to mine employees and their families and to the residents of Phillips County.

CONTACTS: Rick Hotaling, Phillips Resource Area Manager, (406) 654-1240;
Scott Haight, EIS Team Leader, Lewistown District Office, (406) 538-7461;
Jim Robinson, DEQ EIS Team Leader, (406) 444-2074.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Alluvial Valley Floor Exchange - Montco
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** In 1986, the Montana Department of State Lands determined that 2,346 acres of privately owned coal along the Tongue River in southeastern Montana met the criteria to be classified within an Alluvial Valley Floor (AVF). This decision entitled the coal owners to a coal exchange pursuant to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977. Section 510 (b)(5) of this act mandates the federal government to exchange privately owned coal that is rendered unminable due to the AVF determination for federally owned minable coal not within an AVF.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM acknowledges that according to law, the coal owners are entitled to exchange the unminable AVF coal for minable coal and that the BLM is mandated to process the exchange. However, the exchange process will impact district staff, funding and priorities. So far, no additional funding has been allocated to complete the exchange.
- BACKGROUND:** An application to exchange 3,679 acres of private fee coal (2,346 acres of AVF private fee coal, plus 1,333 acres of other private fee coal) for 4,185 acres of federally owned coal which is minable (includes 1,857 acres of federal surface) was received in December 1994. Montco is acting as agent for the Nance/Brown Trust, the fee coal owners.
- The federal coal and surface lands selected by the fee coal owners are adjacent to and intermingled with coal lands currently under the control of Montco and Nance/Brown Trust lands.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** This project is in the earliest stages and the public is not aware of the proposal. The BLM projects a high level of public interest.
- CONTACT:** Dan Benoit, Geologist, or Todd Christensen, Powder River Resource Area Manager, Miles City District, (406) 232-4331.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: 107th Meridian Settlement

ISSUE SUMMARY: The president signed H.R. 5200 ("Crow Settlement Act of 1994") into legislation on November 2, 1994. The purpose of the act was to settle the 107th Meridian boundary dispute created by an erroneous survey made by the federal government. The faulty survey along the eastern boundary of the Crow Indian Reservation affected 36,500 acres of surface and mineral rights due to the Crow Tribe.

AGENCY POSITION: Over a 5-year period, the BLM is entrusted with implementing considerable portions of the act involving sensitive environmental and jurisdictional issues. The three major parts of the legislation are:

1. The transfer of title of undispersed public coal, surface lands, and oil and gas in parcel 1 to the Bureau of Indian Affairs to be held in trust for the Crow Tribe (approximately 365 surface acres and 8,800 mineral acres).
2. A Crow Tribal Trust Fund to be established that will eventually total \$85,000,000 excluding interest. The Trust will be established from three Montana operating mines: East Decker, West Decker, and Spring Creek Mines.
3. Negotiations with the state of Montana to exchange public lands for state trust lands within the Crow Reservation. At one time this figure totaled approximately 46,625 acres; the state currently has approximately 36,000 acres left. On February 2, 1996, the State Land Board provided preliminary approval to proceed with an analysis on an exchange proposal encompassing approximately 5,356 acres (11 tracts) of state land. Public meetings have been held at Butte, Dillon, and Crow Agency to discuss the proposal. The state has selected BLM lands in the Butte District for this initial effort. The 2-year notification to grazing permittees has also been issued.

The act also provides for the exchange of private lands outside the reservation identified by the tribe to make up any difference between state lands exchanged and the 46,625-acre exchange target.

BACKGROUND: In 1961, the Crow Tribe sued the United States for \$80 million to compensate for the surveying error. The U.S. moved for dismissal under the 6-year statute of limitations and the Indian Claims Commission statute of limitations. The tribe claims they did not learn of the surveying error until 1959. The U.S. claims the tribe was on notice since 1926.

Legislation to resolve the 107th Meridian boundary dispute was introduced in Congress in the 1960s and 1970s, and again in 1992, but no such legislation was enacted into law until H.R. 5200 was enacted by the 103rd Congress.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Considerable interest will be generated, particularly in the exchange portion of the act. Socioeconomic considerations, access, and effects on PILT payments are a few of the issues the BLM and other involved entities will need to address in implementing the 46,000 acres of exchange. Also, the willingness of the state and state lands lessees to participate, or the extent of their participation in the exchange program, could become an issue.

CONTACT: Jim Binando, Supervisory Land Use Specialist, (406) 255-2935.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Black-Footed Ferret and Prairie Dog Management

ISSUE SUMMARY: The black-footed ferret is an endangered species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), as amended by Public Law 97-304. Under the ESA, all federal agencies must carry out programs for the conservation of threatened and endangered species.

Ferret recovery requires the establishment of ten widely spaced self-sustaining populations. There may not be ten suitable sites in the nation and all introduction areas are nationally important. All ferrets to be reintroduced must come from captive breeding facilities in Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Kentucky, Virginia, Arizona and Toronto, Canada.

Black-footed ferrets have been released in Shirley Basin, Wyoming, since 1991. They were introduced into Montana and South Dakota in 1994 and 1995, and Arizona in 1996. More than 500 ferrets have been released in the wild; there may be as many as 50 surviving in the wild.

AGENCY POSITION: The BLM is a full partner in ferret introduction; however, our role is not for the captive breeding of ferrets. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) is requesting that other federal and state agencies provide funding for captive breeding of ferrets, but the BLM's position is that the FWS should fund the captive breeding facilities.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Public participation was conducted as part of the Judith-Valley-Phillips and Big Dry Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The BLM, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the FWS worked intensively with private landowners in Phillips County. In 1994, the FWS would not allow coyote control in the Montana release area and coyotes killed more than 50 percent of the ferrets. This was a significant political, emotional and fiscal issue with the agricultural community as well as with conservation and environmental interests. Coyote control and other measures were instituted in 1995.

CONTACT: Dan Hinckley, Endangered Species Biologist, (406) 255-2928



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Noxious Weeds

ISSUE SUMMARY: Noxious weeds are spreading on all lands, reducing natural biodiversity and vegetation production, and leading to soil erosion. BLM noxious weed-infested lands have increased threefold from about 91,000 acres in 1985 to about 292,000 acres in 1995. During this time, the BLM has had funding to treat only 10 to 15,000 acres annually in cooperation with other landowners and managers.

AGENCY POSITION: Montana BLM is committed to integrated weed management (IWM), which includes prevention, education, awareness, biological agents (insects and plant diseases), cultural practices, chemicals and the use of domestic animals. To comply with both federal and state law, the BLM will continue to use an IWM approach. It is imperative that the BLM and other cooperators continue their efforts or the "Weed Battle" will be lost.

Montana BLM has been using Range Improvement and MLR funds for noxious weed management. Weed management will continue to be a very high priority, but lack of available funding will continue to inhibit efforts at all priority levels. MLR funds from appropriate activities must increase if current weed programs and levels of success are to be maintained.

BACKGROUND: The BLM's weed management program involves cooperative efforts with other federal (ARS, APHIS), state (Montana Department of Agriculture) and county (weed districts and extension agents) agencies, high school agriculture science classes and private landowners. There is a heavy emphasis on using prevention techniques to protect non-infested lands throughout the state. These IWM Programs average less than \$21 per acre for the BLM.

In 1995 the BLM made 353 biological weed control agent releases, compared to 212 in 1994. Some of these release sites will be used as insectories for joint efforts between federal, state and county agencies to further disperse the biological control agents within the state, and possibly throughout the western United States. The use of biological control agents is proving to be a very cost effective method for weed management on some noxious weed species such as leafy spurge.

The BLM has cooperated in preventative and educational programs including: "Noxious Weeds — A Growing Concern" brochure and posters; Certified Weed Seed Free Feeds Program; weed educational materials such as Weed ID Handbooks for 4-H Club members and schools; biological weed control demonstration sites at Pompeys Pillar; IWM tours (attendees were from Washington, North Dakota, Montana, Idaho & Wyoming); weed workshops, etc. The Montana BLM staff will continue to provide training and technical assistance to various weed management staffs.

The Blackfoot Ecosystem Weed Demonstration Area has been funded for \$120,000 in FY96. This funding level is to continue for the next 7 years.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Most landowners are concerned about the spread of noxious weeds onto their land. The method of control of noxious weeds is their main concern. Weed management cooperative groups and individuals will continue to petition congressional representatives for assistance with this problem.

CONTACT: Hank McNeel, Weed and Pest Management Specialist, (406) 255-2931.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: Gallatin Range Consolidation Protection Act.

ISSUE SUMMARY: On September 18, 1995, the BLM and the Forest Service (FS) entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to cooperate in the exchange of approximately \$12-15 million worth of lands and other federal assets under the BLM's administration to facilitate federal consolidation of private inholdings owned by Big Sky Lumber Company (BSL) within the Gallatin National Forest in Montana.

AGENCY POSITION: A. The BLM and FS will identify actions or legislation needed to complete the goals of the MOU, identify funding and staffing needs, and establish an approach and schedule for completion of the exchange(s).

B. The BLM and FS will cooperate in completing the analysis work and documentation needed to complete the exchange(s), including appraisal and title review. If funding and staff capabilities needed to complete the exchange(s) are not made available to the BLM, the workload identified will become the responsibility of the FS.

C. The BLM developed a list of potential exchange lands (approximately 150,000 acres) and other assets for consideration for completing its portion of the remaining BSL acquisitions. From this offering, BSL selected almost 10,000 acres valued at approximately \$6 million. A mineral revenue proposal also may be developed which may be in the range of \$1 to \$3 million. The next phase of the process will be public involvement and legislative drafting. Before this occurs, however, the FS must prepare a report for Congress to review.

No funding or direction was provided to the BLM in FY96. Approximately \$100,000 will be needed to consummate the undertaking.

BACKGROUND: In passing the Gallatin Range Consolidation and Protection Act (P.L. 103-91, October 1993), Congress found that private inholdings of BSL possess outstanding characteristics that give the lands high value as potential additions to the National Forest system. Congress authorized and directed the Secretary of Agriculture to acquire these lands, by purchase or exchange, under provisions and timeframes specified in this legislation.

Since 1993, the FS, in partnership with Yellowstone National Park, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and other agencies and conservation organizations, has acquired nearly 42,000 acres of these BSL lands by exchange and purchase. While a portion of the lands identified in the act have been acquired, nearly 64,000 acres of critical inholdings remain to be acquired. To help complete this consolidation and implement the goals of the act, the public lands administered by the BLM in the State of Montana through the recently signed MOU and identified above, could be used in an exchange.

PUBLIC INTEREST: Considerable interest will be generated in the proposed BLM exchange(s). Socioeconomic implications, access, loss of current BLM public resources (approximately 10,000 acres), and the effects on PILT payments are a few of the issues the BLM and other involved entities will need to address.

CONTACT: Jim Binando, Supervisory Land Use Specialist, (406) 255-2935



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Wild Horse and Burro Program
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** The Wild Horse and Burro Program in Montana and the Dakotas has two primary goals: the management of the wild horse herd in the Pryor Mountains and the adoption of excess animals from the Pryors and other herd management areas in the western states.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM will continue to manage the Pryor horse herd for optimum benefits to the animals and the fragile ecology of the Pryor Mountains. There will be satellite adoption events as long as there is a strong public demand for adoption of wild horses and burros.
- BACKGROUND:** Montana's only free-roaming wild horses are found in the Pryor Mountains, approximately 60 miles south of Billings. These animals are reputed to be of Spanish ancestry, as evidenced by genetic studies and blood typing efforts done over the past 5 years. Management of this herd is guided by the Pryor Mountain Herd Area Management Plan, which emphasizes preservation of the herd's heritage and attributes of wildness.
- The BLM was mandated to manage wild horses and burros by the Wild Free Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971. This act states, "It is the policy of Congress that wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment or death." It also decrees that the Secretary (of the Interior) "... maintain a thriving natural ecological balance on the public lands." Since horses and burros have limited natural predators, their numbers may increase until the public lands are overstocked and there is no longer "a thriving natural ecological balance." Therefore, the act provides for the removal of excess animals by the BLM or its contractors and placement with qualified adopters.
- Excess wild horses from the Pryor Range and other states are placed in the hands of approved adopters at temporary adoption events (satellite adoptions). This adoption program has been very effective. Since 1984, more than 10,000 horses have been placed in Montana and the Dakotas. There is also a large demand for burros, which are quite effective in defending sheep from the predation of coyotes and domestic dogs.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Public interest in wild horses is broad and intense. Local and national groups occasionally get involved in issues surrounding the Pryor Mountain and sanctuary horses. Some groups are interested in minimizing any human management of the horses, some are concerned primarily about humane treatment of the horses, and some are concerned about the economics of the horse program. Wild horse issues occasionally attract national media attention.
- CONTACT:** Linda Coates-Markle, Wild Horse & Burro Specialist, (406) 238-1548.



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Upper Columbia River Basin Assessment and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** The BLM and Forest Service (FS) are charged with developing a scientifically sound, ecosystem-based strategy for management of the lands under their jurisdiction in the Upper Columbia River Basin (UCRB) in Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Wyoming and a small part of Washington.
- This strategy may modify existing land use plans. The EIS that will accompany this strategy will use the information from the *Scientific Assessment for Ecosystem Management in the Interior Columbia River Basin* and information received from the public as a basis for issue determination and for evaluating alternative strategies.
- The strategy will be adopted in the form of decisions about desired ranges of future conditions for ecosystems, and related standards and guidelines for management of public lands on all or part of the UCRB.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM joined the FS in January 1994 to make the ecosystem management plan a basin-wide effort in order to accomplish President Clinton's July 1993 directions to develop such a plan.
- BACKGROUND:** This effort is an outgrowth of past efforts in the Pacific Northwest. The decisions in this EIS will supersede any interim direction resulting from the *Environmental Assessment for the Implementation of Interim Strategies for Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon and Washington, Idaho, and portions of California* (commonly referred to as "PACFISH").
- The EIS will address forest and rangeland ecosystem health; aquatic and riparian ecosystem health; and the long term sustainability of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. A few of the issues of recent months have been the spotted owl, Snake River salmon, bull trout, large wildfires and Rangeland Reform.
- A similar EIS (Interior Columbia River Basin EIS) is being developed for that portion of the Columbia River Basin located in Oregon and Washington east of the Cascade Range.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Public scoping began in February 1995 with meetings held throughout the UCRB.
- A draft EIS is projected for completion by August 1996 with a record of decision planned by January 1997.
- CONTACT:** George Hirschenberger, UCRB Project coordinator for Montana, Garnet Resource Area, (406) 329-3908.



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

- SUBJECT:** Beaverhead Lawsuit Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- ISSUE SUMMARY:** The BLM and the Forest Service (FS) are cooperating on an EIS amending the Beaverhead/Deerlodge Forest Plan. A lawsuit against the Beaverhead National Forest grazing program resulted in a court-approved settlement agreement stipulating that the FS would propose an amendment to the forest plan to incorporate revised riparian guidelines. Analysis includes BLM lands located within grazing allotments administered by the FS and the BLM.
- AGENCY POSITION:** The BLM supports the idea of sharing available resource data and scarce skills to avoid duplication of effort, while developing a consistent approach to resource management. The BLM is actively participating on a committee sponsored by the Montana Public Lands Council which is attempting to draft a consensus alternative to be addressed in the EIS.
- BACKGROUND:** The Beaverhead National Forest, National Wildlife Federation (NWF), and intervenors representing the livestock industry reached a settlement on the lawsuit brought by the NWF over the forest's grazing program. One of the provisions of the agreement requires the FS to begin an analysis of an amendment to the Beaverhead forest plan to "incorporate revised riparian management guidelines." These guidelines would clarify how the FS and BLM should manage creeks and streams and their associated soil and vegetation on jointly managed grazing allotments.
- The BLM entered into a memorandum of understanding identifying the FS as the lead agency and the BLM as a cooperating agency on this EIS. The BLM has assigned two specialists to the interdisciplinary team and one person to the oversight committee. A draft EIS is scheduled for public release in November 1996.
- PUBLIC INTEREST:** Several national conservation groups and FS and BLM grazing permittees have expressed concerns for management of riparian systems throughout southwestern Montana.
- CONTACT:** Scott Powers, Dillon Resource Area Manager, (406) 683-2337.



BRIEFING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: BLM Office Space in Billings

ISSUE SUMMARY: The 20-year lease on the building housing the BLM's Montana State Office expired in April 1996. A two-year extension has been consummated between GSA and Harrison Fagg. General Services Administration (GSA) is the leasing agent for the BLM and will negotiate the BLM space lease through competition as required by the Competition in Contracting Act. The BLM's input is primarily limited to the required request for space. The GSA will examine all offers for leasing space that meet the BLM's revised requirements, whether they be for existing space or for new construction.

AGENCY POSITION: The national budget situation mandates that the government seek the most cost-effective methods of doing business. We believe that consolidating the BLM's four leased sites in Billings would lead to greater efficiencies by eliminating functions now duplicated in the same city. Vehicles could be pooled in a single location resulting in better utilization and potential decreases in actual vehicle numbers. A potential savings also exists through a reduction in the number of administrative personnel needed in a consolidated space arrangement. Additionally, BLM customers would be able to conduct all their business with the agency at a single location.

BACKGROUND: The BLM's request for space was completed in 1992 and then forwarded to the GSA. The latest revision to the space package was completed in September 1995 and forwarded to GSA. The request consolidates space currently leased at four different areas in Billings to a single location. The four areas are the Montana State Office, now in downtown Billings; an adjacent radio/electronics building; warehouse space currently a mile and a half from the State Office; and the Billings Resource Area Office now located at 810 East Main Street. The request also includes an on-site wareyard (currently at the Main Street location). The wareyard is used for outdoor storage of items such as fencing posts and fabric, lumber and trailers.

PUBLIC INTEREST: The Billings Commercial Realtors Group is on record as formally opposing any plans to construct a new building for the BLM. The group has shared that opinion with Montana's congressional delegation and local government officials. The BLM and GSA have received several congressional letters and contacts expressing concerns about the space request.

CONTACT: Tanisha Harrison, General Services Administration, (303) 236-1770, or Larry Hamilton, State Director, (406) 255-2904



BRIDGING STATEMENT

MONTANA/DAKOTAS BLM

June 1996

SUBJECT: The Blackfoot Challenge

ISSUE SUMMARY: The Gamet Resource Area, Butte District, has entered into a partnership called the "The Blackfoot Challenge" to coordinate land stewardship efforts. The partnership is composed of private landowners, industry representatives, conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies. The purpose of the organization is to support ecosystem management through cooperative resource management, to help manage for the future, and to keep the area's desired characteristics.

BACKGROUND: The Blackfoot Valley is a 1.4 million-acre drainage located in western Montana near Missoula. Approximately 55 percent is managed by federal and state agencies, 20 percent by corporate timber companies, and 25 percent by other private landowners.

The Blackfoot Challenge is the largest coordinated resource management effort in Montana. It is organized through a 14-member steering committee. Reporting to the steering committee are resources, public relations, funding, private lands and legal committees.

The goals of the Blackfoot Challenge are:

- (1) To provide a forum for the timely distribution of technical and topical information from public and private sources;
- (2) To foster communication between public and private interests to avoid duplication of efforts and capitalize on opportunities;
- (3) To recognize and work with the diverse interests in the Blackfoot Valley to resolve issues and avoid confrontation;
- (4) To examine the cumulative effects of land management decisions and promote actions that will decrease adverse impacts in the Blackfoot Valley; and
- (5) To provide a forum of public and private resources to resolve issues.

PUBLIC INTEREST: The proposal has been a high visibility effort and well received by the Blackfoot Valley landowners and the public. The Blackfoot Valley's highly diverse recreation values, its habitat for bull trout, west slope cutthroat trout, bald eagles, grizzly bears, and its cultural diversity insures that the public interest will continue to be very high.

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